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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: June 3, 1961

12:45 P.M.

Residence of the
American Ambassador,
ViennaSUBJECT: Vienna Meeting Between The President
and Chairman Khrushchev.USPARTICIPANTS: The President
The Secretary
Ambassador Bohlen
Ambassador Thompson
EUR - Mr. Kohler
D - Mr. Akalovsky,
(Interpreting)USSRChairman Khrushchev
Foreign Minister Gromyko
Mr. Dobrynin, Chief, American
Countries Division, USSR
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ambassador Menshikov
Mr. Sukhodrev, Interpreter,
USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs

COPIES TO:

The White House

The Secretary

Mr. Kohler

Permanent record copy for the Executive Secretariat's conference file.

The President said he wanted to express his pleasure at seeing Chairman Khrushchev and recalled his earlier meeting in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during Mr. Khrushchev's visit in the United States. The President said that he had talked to the Soviet Foreign Minister and the Soviet Ambassador and that he was extremely interested in discussing at least to a certain extent matters affecting the relations between the two countries. He said he hoped that during these two days a better understanding of the problems confronting us could be reached, and that the conversations would be useful.

Mr. Khrushchev said that he also wished the conversations to be useful. He remembered the meeting in the Foreign Relations Committee and said that the President had been late for that meeting, so that there was no opportunity to say much except hello and goodbye. He also recalled that he had told the President that he had heard of him as a young and promising man in politics. He was glad now to meet him as President.

The President replied that he also remembered this remark and said that Mr. Khrushchev had told him that he was very youthful in appearance. The President remarked that he must have aged since then.

Mr. Khrushchev

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Mr. Khrushchev wondered whether he had really said that. Normally he did not say such things because young people want to look older and older people like to look younger. He said that he had had a similar experience because in his youth he had looked much younger than his age and had regarded it as offensive if someone made a mistake about his age. However, he obtained a kind of mandate of old age by beginning to gray at the age of twenty-two. In any event, if he could he would be happy to share his years with the President or change places with him.

The President stated that as President, bearing heavy responsibilities just as Mr. Khrushchev as leader of his country, he was concerned about how it would be possible for the two countries -- allied with other countries, having different political and social systems, and competing with each other in different parts of the world -- to find during his Presidency ways and means of not permitting situations where the two countries would be committed to actions involving their security or endangering peace, to secure which is our basic objective.

Mr. Khrushchev replied that the Soviet Union had endeavored for a long time to develop friendly relations with the United States and its allies. Such relations would bring about peace and would be in the interest of the two countries and the world at large. At the same time the Soviet Union did not wish to reach agreement with the U.S. at the expense of other peoples because such agreement would not mean peace. Several basic questions must be resolved. Without their solution sources of tension between the two countries would continue to exist. Such solutions are all the more necessary because the Soviet Union believes that the situations of the two countries do not impel them to clash with each other. Mr. Khrushchev said that what he had in mind was primarily the economic field, which was basic. The United States is a rich country and has all the necessary resources. So far, the Soviet Union has been poorer than the United States and it recognizes that fact. However, the Soviet Union will develop -- not at U.S. expense, because it has no predatory intentions, but rather by developing its own human and natural resources. Mr. Khrushchev said that he did not want to conceal that the USSR was challenging the United States; it wants to become richer than the United States and this is not just a desire but there is some real foundation for such a development. The U.S. may not agree with this but then the U.S. can also develop further. In any event, it is necessary to suppress any feeling of envy, if it exists. The Soviet Union does not wish to stand in the way of U.S. economic development.

The President remarked that he was impressed with the rate of growth in the Soviet Union and said that this was surely a source of satisfaction to Mr. Khrushchev, as it was to us.

Mr. Khrushchev

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Mr. Khrushchev said that the West and the U.S. as its leader must recognize one fact: Communism exists and has won its right to develop. Such recognition should be de facto and not de jure. United States policy under Dulles excluded such possibility; Mr. Dulles had based his policy on the premise of liquidation of the Communist system. This struggle against Communism would of course never lead to the establishment of good relations between our two countries. The existence of the Soviet system does not depend on the United States just as the existence of the capitalist system does not depend on the Soviet Union. Relations between our two countries could develop only if this fact is recognized. Mr. Khrushchev said that he had raised this point not for the purpose of arguing. He would not try to convince the President about the advantages of Communism, just as the President should not waste his time to convert him to capitalism. Mr. Khrushchev repeated that the recognition he had referred to should be de facto.

The President said that Mr. Khrushchev's remarks raised a very important problem. Mr. Khrushchev disagrees with the interpretation of the policy ascribed by him to Dulles, who, according to Mr. Khrushchev, had sought to eliminate Communist control in areas under such control, and says that this represents failure to recognize Communism as a fact in that area. His own interpretation of the situation was, the President continued, that the Soviet Union was seeking to eliminate free systems in areas that are associated with us. So while objecting to efforts directed at eliminating Communism in areas under the Communist system, Mr. Khrushchev appears to believe that it is appropriate to exert efforts to eliminate free systems. This is a matter of very serious concern to us.

Mr. Khrushchev said that this was an incorrect interpretation of Soviet policy. The Soviet Union is against implanting its policy in other states. As a matter of fact, this would be an impossible task. What the Soviet Union says is that Communism will triumph. This is a different proposition because it represents a teaching, a scientific analysis of social development. The United States may not accept this teaching, but the Soviet Union proceeds from one assumption alone, namely, that any change in the social system should depend on the will of the peoples themselves. The Soviet Union is for change. It believes that it is now in the political arena and it is challenging the capitalist system just as that system had challenged feudalism in the past. The French Revolution was the first instance where such challenge was made. The response to the French Revolution was the creation of the Holy Alliance, which failed, primarily because Russia was its leader. In those days Russia was a feudal state, but now it is a Communist country. The Soviet Union has proposed general

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and complete disarmament. This is a manifestation of its intention not to use arms. The Soviet Union believes that human minds will develop and it believes in its system, just as the President believes in its own system. In any event this is not a matter for argument, much less for war.

The President said that he believed that the most important problem for the two sides was to have some understanding of their respective views on the differences that exist. Such understanding would explain the actions of the two sides as distinct from what their interpretation might be otherwise. Our position is that people should have free choice. In some cases minorities seize control in areas associated with us, minorities which do not express the will of the people. Such groups associate themselves with the USSR and act against the interests of the United States. The USSR believes that this is a historical inevitability. This is a matter of concern to us because we do not believe that this is a historical inevitability. This brings in conflict the USSR as center of Communist power and the US as center of our power. Thus the problem is how to conduct this disagreement in areas where we have interests without direct confrontation of the two countries and thus to serve the interests of our people. The President said that his interest here was to explain our concern about what Mr. Khrushchev says is an inevitability. We cannot regard this to be an inevitability. We believe in our system just as Mr. Khrushchev believes in his.

Mr. Khrushchev replied that this was correct but wondered whether the United States wanted to build a dam preventing the development of human mind and conscience. To do such a thing is not in man's power. The Spanish Inquisition burned people who disagreed with it but ideas did not burn and eventually came out as victors. Thus if we start struggling against ideas, conflicts and clashes between the two countries will be inevitable. Once an idea is born it cannot be chained or burned. History should be the judge in the argument between ideas. People will judge capitalism and Communism by the results of their respective efforts. If capitalism insures better living for people it will win. Conversely, if Communism achieves this goal, it will be the winner. Mr. Khrushchev said that he wanted to emphasize that what he had in mind was victory of ideas, not a military victory. In any event, the military aspect has become unimportant today.

The President expressed his belief that his and Mr. Khrushchev's obligation to the peoples of the US and the USSR respectively was to have this struggle for ideas, which is part of our times,

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conducted without affecting the vital security interests of the two countries. The Soviet Union as a national entity has certain essential interests. The same is true of the United States. The struggle in other areas should be conducted in a way which would not involve the two countries directly and would not affect their national interest or prestige. As Mr. Khrushchev knows from history -- and this, the President said, he had discussed with Gromyko -- it is very easy to involve countries in certain actions. We might get involved in a struggle which would affect the peace of the world and the interests of our peoples.

Mr. Khrushchev said that he hoped that he had misunderstood the President's remarks. He wanted to seek clarification of whether the President wanted to place the responsibility for the development of Communist ideas on the Soviet Union. Did the President want to say that Communism should exist only in those countries that are already Communist and that if Communist ideas should develop the U.S. would be in conflict with the USSR? Such an understanding of the situation is incorrect, and if there really is such an understanding, conflicts will be inevitable. Ideas do not belong to any one nation and they cannot be retracted. Marx and Engels were the originators of Communist ideas; even if the originators of ideas were to reject their own ideas, the ideas once born would continue to develop. There is no immunization against ideas. Mr. Khrushchev continued by saying that if he should renounce Communism -- something he has no intention of doing -- his friends would exclude him from their group but the idea would continue developing. De facto recognition of the two main ideas -- although some other ideas may develop -- is essential for the peaceful development of the world. Ideas should be propagated without the use of arms or interference in the internal affairs of other states. If Communist ideas should spread in other countries, the USSR would be happy, just as the US would be glad if capitalist ideas were to spread. In any event, the spread of ideas should depend on peoples alone. Ideas should not be borne on bayonets or on missile warheads, bayonets now being obsolete. This would mean war and the USSR does not accept such a situation. Mr. Khrushchev said that he would guarantee that the USSR would not exceed the bounds of this professed policy, namely, that ideas would not be imposed by war.

The President interjected that Mao Tse Tung had said that power was at the end of the rifle.

Mr. Khrushchev replied that he did not believe that Mao Tse Tung could have said this. Mao Tse Tung is a Marxist and Marxists have always been against war. A vivid example of this position is the fact that during the Russo-Japanese war Plekhanov,

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leader of Russian Social Democrats in those days, embraced Kotoyama, leader of the Japanese Socialists, as a sign of friendship between peoples. Kotoyama was a prominent leader of Japanese Socialists and he died in the USSR in 1935 or 1936 as a very old man.

The President said that he understood Mr. Khrushchev's point of view but that he was anxious to give him our views. Mr. Khrushchev's belief in the inevitability of the spread of Communism is well known. The President said that he would try to explain how we view the situation so as to make it easier to understand our actions and motivations. Our basic objective should be preservation of peace and if we fail in that effort both our countries will lose. Our two countries possess modern weapons while other countries do not possess such weapons. West Europe suffered a great deal during the war but now it has risen again and is prospering. However, if our two countries should miscalculate they would lose for a long time to come. Thus, his own views notwithstanding, Mr. Khrushchev should consider our views on the development of the world so that the chances of peace should be increased and our peoples would not stand a loss. His own main ambition, the President said, it to secure peace.

Mr. Khrushchev responded by saying that he had often seen similar statements in the US press. Miscalculation, he said, was a very vague term. However, it looked to him as if the United States wanted the USSR to sit like a school boy with his hands on his desk. The Soviet Union supports its ideas and holds them in high esteem. It cannot guarantee that these ideas will stop at its borders. He said that he did not quite understand what kind of conditions, in US view, the USSR should maintain in order to ensure peace. He wondered what the meaning of the term "miscalculation" was. He said the Soviet Union would defend its vital interests and the United States might regard some of such acts as "miscalculation". However, the USSR believes in defending its interests. Moreover, the same term could be used by the USSR with regard to some actions by the other side. In any event, the West has been using this term much too often. The USSR is not a militant country and it does not want war, but it cannot be intimidated either. To use this term "miscalculation", Mr. Khrushchev said, it would be irresponsible to make a miscalculation, regardless of which of the two sides did it. Both would lose equally and would be punished equally. Modern war would not be like World War I or II. The USSR appreciates this fact just as the United States does. The term "miscalculation" should be stored away, particularly since its use by the West does not affect the USSR at all.

The President

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The President said that he wanted to explain what he meant by "miscalculation". He said it was impossible to predict the next move of any country. As Mr. Khrushchev knows, history shows that it is extremely difficult to make a judgment as to what other countries would do next. The Soviet Union has surely experienced this, just as the United States has. Western Europe has suffered a great deal because of its failure to foresee with precision what other countries would do. Such failure has not been limited to other countries alone. Just recently, the President continued, he had mentioned certain misjudgments by the United States. An example of such misjudgments were certain actions by the United States in connection with the Korean situation, where the United States had failed to foresee what the Chinese would do. However, misjudgment can be avoided and the purpose of this meeting is to introduce precision in judgments of the two sides and to obtain a clearer understanding of where we are going.

Mr. Khrushchev said he agreed with this and this was how he too regarded the meeting. The purpose of this conversation was not to worsen but to improve the relations between the two countries and if the President and himself should succeed in this effort, the expenses incurred in connection with the meeting would be well justified. On the other hand, if they should fail, not only the expenses would not be justified, but -- what is much more important -- the hopes of the peoples would be frustrated.

At this point the group moved to the dining room for lunch.

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